



# CORE MESSAGE GUIDE FOR **COVID-19** SBC INTERVENTIONS

Maximizing efficiency and accurate message delivery  
in the COVID-19 SBC response



**USAID**  
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# INTRODUCTION

Health communication is most effective when consistent messages are communicated to similar audiences through multiple channels. A standard set of core messages should be developed for use by health communicators to ensure consistency across the country.

This document provides standard core messages for COVID-19 prevention and control response. The core messages provided in this guide are generic and designed to be tailored to specific audiences or group of audiences. The messages must be presented in a manner that appeals to and resonates with the intended audiences. To do so, health communication practitioners must assess the demographic, cultural, and psychosocial characteristics of the specific audiences they aim to reach. The key messages should then be developed based on assessment or rumor tracking and information gathered through different mechanisms. The key messages can be targeted to the intended audiences through different channels, including interpersonal communication. If communication material(s) need to be developed, the creative concept should be developed with input from relevant communication professionals. Risk communicators need to ensure messages are context oriented, culturally appropriate and scientifically correct, and in line with the directions and guidelines of the Ministry of Health, EPHI and WHO.

## PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This message guide for COVID-19 SBC programming is intended to serve as a reference for SBC practitioners in order to provide accurate and consistent messaging for COVID-19 response and maximize efficiency. All health communication practitioners working in COVID-19 in Ethiopia are expected to adhere to the core messages provided in this guide.

This guide provides core messages that help derive key messages. SBC practitioners are expected to use these core messages by developing them to key messages that are appropriate for the geographic area, cultural context and medium selection. Definitions of core messages and key messages is provided below.

## WORKING DEFINITIONS

**Core Messages** are generic messages that help advance recommended behaviors for solving health problems. Core messages relate to actions by a specific group (audience) that would help address root causes of a health problem.

**Key Messages** are specific core messages that include key benefits for the intended audiences. The key messages explain why the audience should practice the recommended behaviors.

**Barriers of Communication Problems** are root causes that health communication interventions can and should address. Communication problems can be root causes of a specific prioritized health problem.

## SPECIFIC CORE MESSAGES PER AUDIENCE FOR COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS RELATED TO COVID-19

### AUDIENCE 1

#### People Using Public Transport

##### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Low risk perception

##### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Being aware of COVID-19 transmission during transportation
- Knowing and understanding all ways of COVID-19 transmission, so that one can protect self from COVID-19

##### CORE MESSAGES

- COVID-19 can be transmitted during our stay inside public transport vehicles
- People around you in a transport may have COVID-19, some may show symptoms, some may not show symptoms. Be aware that persons with no COVID-19 symptoms

**AUDIENCE 1****People Using Public Transport****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inappropriate use of mask

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding and practicing appropriate use of face masks

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Always Use face masks in public places including on public transports to prevent COVID-19
- Make sure you practice other preventive measures even if you are wearing a mask
- Cautions when using face masks
  - One person should have 2-3 pieces of non-medical face masks to use alternatively
  - Do not wear a mask frequently without properly washing it
  - Do not touch the outer part of the mask at all times. Use the strings that go behind your ears to handle the mask.
  - Do not wear your mask on your chin, neck or other places. Use it only to cover both your mouth and nose at the same time.
  - Once you use it, do not put the mask in your bag or pocket

**BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Lack of consistency in maintaining physical distancing

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Keeping 2-meter distance from others

**CORE MESSAGES**

- In any transport station, keep 2-meter distance from the next person.
- You may catch the virus from anyone who is within 2 meters from you, even if that person is not showing symptoms
- do not get on board a public transport vehicle if there isn't at least one empty seat on each side of you

**AUDIENCE 1****People Using Public Transport****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Hands touching different surfaces

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth before washing hands or using a sanitizer

**CORE MESSAGES**

- If you touched any surface in the transport vehicle, clean your hands very well with a sanitizer
- Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands before you wash your hands with soap or use a hand sanitizer

**AUDIENCE 2****Retailers and Buyers****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Low knowledge on ways of transmission during marketing

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Not touching items for sell unless purchasing

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Try not to touch items in the store unless you are buying them. you may be contaminating the items yourself for others. Cash may contain the virus that causes COVID-19. Do not keep materials you use frequently like keys and mobile phones with cash
- Sanitize/wash your hands after you finish your shopping
- During your stay in the market or a store, do not touch your eyes, mouth or nose without washing your hands with soap or thoroughly sanitizing them

**AUDIENCE 2****Retailers and Buyers****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inappropriate use of mask

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding and practicing appropriate use of face masks

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Always Use face masks in public places including in shopping centers and marketplaces to prevent COVID-19
- Make sure you practice other preventive measures even if you are wearing a mask
- Cautions when using face masks
  - One person should have 2-3 pieces of face masks to use alternatively
  - Do not wear a mask frequently without properly washing it
  - Do not touch the outer part of the mask at all times. Use the strings that go behind your ears to handle the mask.
  - Do not wear your mask on your chin, neck or other places. Use it only to cover both your mouth and nose at the same time
  - Once you use it, do not put the mask in your bag or pocket

**BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Lack of consistency in maintaining physical distancing

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Keeping 2-meter distance from others

**CORE MESSAGES**

- In any transport station, keep 2-meter distance from the next person.
- You may catch the virus from anyone who is within 2 meters from you, even if that person is not showing symptoms
- do not get on board a public transport vehicle if there isn't at least one empty seat on each side of you

## AUDIENCE 2

### Retailers and Buyers

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Inadequate and inconsistent physical distancing

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Keeping 2-meter distance from others

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Practice one window shopping as much as possible as it helps you limit contact with many people.
- Keep 2-meter distance from people when you are in marketplaces

## AUDIENCE 3

### Young People

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Low perceived vulnerability and severity

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Understanding that COVID can also affect youth and their families and can be severe

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Everyone, including young people and children, can be easily infected COVID-19 if exposed. Ethiopia case report shows majority of COVID-19 infections occurred among young people
- Evidence shows there is high death of COVID-19 in young people
- Your exposure to COVID-19 will affect your family members including parents and children



### AUDIENCE 3 Young People

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Inappropriate and inconsistent use of mask

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Consistent and proper use of non-medical face masks

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Always Use face masks in all public places including on public transports, in marketplaces and other places to prevent COVID-19
- Make sure you practice other preventive measures even if you are wearing a mask
- Cautions when using face masks
  - One person should have 2-3 pieces of face masks to use alternatively
  - Do not wear a mask frequently without properly washing it
  - Do not touch the outer part of the mask at all times. Use the strings that go behind your ears to handle the mask.
  - Do not wear your mask on your chin, neck or other places. Use it only to cover both your mouth and nose at the same time
  - Once you use it, do not put the mask in your bag or pocket

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Inadequate and inconsistent physical distancing

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Keeping 2-meter distance from others

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Stay at home as much as you can
- If, for any reason, you have to go outside your house, keep a 2-meter distance from the next person, even if they're your friends, since people may be asymptomatic but can still transmit the virus

#### AUDIENCE 4

##### Elders

###### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Low knowledge on the transmission

###### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Understanding all ways of COVID-19 transmission methods so that one can protect self from COVID-19

###### CORE MESSAGES

- The virus that causes COVID - 19 can be transmitted from one person to another through:
  - Droplets during coughing and sneezing
  - Direct contact with a person who has the virus, even if that person is not showing any symptoms
  - Contact with any surfaces

###### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Poor care seeking

###### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Early seeking of medical care

###### CORE MESSAGES

- If you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19 or suspect that you have contact with any infected person, Call 8335 or 952 (or the appropriate regional number) immediately.
- COVID-19 can be cured with proper medical care in treatment centers prepared for this purpose so that further infection of other members of your family can be stopped.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 include:
  - Fever or history of fever and
  - Cough or
  - Shortness of breath

**AUDIENCE 4****Elders****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Low knowledge on susceptibility for severe infection

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding the risk of COVID-19 particularly on the elderly

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Older people are more susceptible to serious illness or death because of COVID-19

**AUDIENCE 5****People with Disabilities****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Low knowledge on COVID-19 symptoms and transmission

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding the symptoms and ways of transmission

**CORE MESSAGES**

- COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease caused by the most recently discovered Coronavirus
- Symptoms of COVID-19 include:
  - Fever or history of fever and
  - Cough or
  - Shortness of breath
- Methods of transmission:
  - Through droplets during coughing and sneezing
  - Through direct contact with a person who has the virus
  - Through indirect contact with any surfaces

**AUDIENCE 5****People with Disabilities****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Blind people lack knowledge on preventive actions

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding preventive actions

**CORE MESSAGES**

- If you are blind, use the following action to prevent COVID-19:
  - Stay at home so that you can reduce your chance of getting the virus
  - Have sanitizer with you wherever you go outside your home
  - If you touch anything with your hands such as working with your braille and others, clean with your sanitizer
  - Your supportive cane can be contaminated with the virus. Wash or Sanitize it frequently
  - If you have to go out for any essential service, make sure you use masks

**AUDIENCE 6****People Living with HIV****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Fear of COVID during seeking care

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Adhering to ART

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Continue taking your ART
  - People who have low immunity are more susceptible to COVID-19 infection. ART enhances your body's immune system
  - Providers at health facilities take all necessary precautions during service provision to avoid transmission of COVID-19

**AUDIENCE 6****People Living with HIV****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Low knowledge on COVID-19 preventive methods

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Understanding and practicing COVID-19 preventive measures

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Stay at home as much as possible. If, for any reason, you have to go outside your house, avoid crowded areas and keep a 2-meter distance from anyone anywhere
- Wash your hands with soap frequently or use hand sanitizers
- Quarantine yourself in a room within your house and call 8335 or 952 (or the appropriate regional number) if you have any of the following symptoms: Fever or history of fever, Cough or Shortness of breath

**AUDIENCE 7****Long Distance Truck Drivers****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inconsistent practice of preventive actions

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Practicing all appropriate COVID-19 preventive measures at all times

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Take the following measures during your travel and stay:
  - Keep 2-meter distance from other people at all times
  - Wash your hands with soap as frequently as you can or use hand sanitizer frequently
  - Make sure that your assistant is practicing all preventive actions
  - Dispose of water bottles properly in areas designated for trash. Do not throw away anywhere.
  - Do not eat uncooked food during your travel

### AUDIENCE 8

Children (5-15 years old) and parents

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Limited physical exercise

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Carry out simple physical exercise routines while staying at home

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Children: As you are staying at home for long time, you need to do simple physical exercises to keep your body and mind active

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Frustrations arising from prolonged stay at home

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Carry out fun activities that can take children's and parents' minds occupied

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Parents: Take some time for children to have some fun, walk with them, make them busy in different tasks, appreciate for their accomplishment

#### BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Mistreatment and abuse

#### RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS

- Appropriate treatment of children

#### CORE MESSAGES

- Parents: As your children are confined at home, they may get frustrated and misbehave. Maintain active and smooth communication, making sure to encourage positive actions/behaviors, and taking age appropriate disciplinary measures



**AUDIENCE 8****Children (5-15 years old) and parents****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Negligence on frequent hand washing

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Washing hands properly and frequently with soap and water

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Parents: If your children go outside the house for any reason, remind them to wash their hands and face with soap as soon as they return to help them prevent infection of COVID-19

**AUDIENCE 9****IDPs and Refugees****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inconsistent practice of preventive actions

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Practicing all appropriate COVID-19 preventive measures at all times

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Keep 2-meter distance from other people
- Wash your hands with soap frequently or use hand sanitizer

**BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Poor early care seeking

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Seeking care early for COVID-19 symptoms

**CORE MESSAGES**

- If you suspect that you have contacted COVID-19 or come into contact with any known patient, quarantine yourself and call 8335 or 952 (or the appropriate regional number) immediately to receive care for yourself and protect your family and friends

**AUDIENCE 10****Healthcare Professionals****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inadequate precaution measures taken during service delivery

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Taking universal COVID-19 prevention precautions during service delivery

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Take universal infection prevention precautions during triage since a patient who comes to the health facility for any case may have COVID-19

**AUDIENCE 11****Taxi Drivers****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inconsistent practice of preventive actions

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Practicing preventive actions consistently

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Keep 2-meter distance from other people when you are not driving
- Use face masks properly at all times in your work
- Wash your hands with soap frequently or use a hand sanitizer
- Clean your vehicle, especially parts you touch frequently like the steering wheel, the gear stick and dashboard areas with alcohol as your customers or yourself might have contaminated them
- Make sure that your assistant washes his/her hands with soap frequently or uses hand sanitizers every time after handling cash. COVID-19 can also be transmitted through close contacts and cash exchanges

**AUDIENCE 11****Taxi Drivers****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Non-compliance with guidelines and regulations

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Complying with guidelines and regulations

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Limit the number of travelers in your taxi
  - Having more people in one taxi will expose you and your customers to COVID-19 infection
  - Make sure that all the travelers use masks while in your vehicle

**AUDIENCE 12****Janitors****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Loose safety measures

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Consistent safety measures

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Your work makes you vulnerable to COVID-19 infection
- Take the following measures in your daily work:
  - Use heavy duty gloves when you are cleaning anything
  - Do not pick any trash up without wearing gloves
  - Dispose of all trashes properly
  - Use masks at all times while cleaning and when in public
  - Wash your hands and your duty clothes with soap frequently every time you finish cleaning
  - Do not take your duty clothes home

**AUDIENCE 13**  
**General Population****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Perception that COVID can be treated by traditional medicine

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Avoiding to rely on traditional

**CORE MESSAGES**

- COVID-19 has no treatment and vaccination so far but can be prevented by taking the recommended preventive measures
- If infection occurs, the best chance you have to recover soon and prevent transmission to your loved ones is to seek medical care in the isolation centers

**BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Poor treatment seeking

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Seeking care (even for mild symptoms)

**CORE MESSAGES**

- If you have COVID-19 or suspect that you have contact with any infected person with COVID-19, Call 8335 or 952 (or the appropriate regional number) immediately. This prevents the spread of the disease to your family and others
- Your chances of rapid recovery from COVID-19 is through proper care provided in treatment centers prepared for this purpose. The treatment centers are well equipped and service is provided by well qualified health professionals
- Common symptoms are:
  - Fever or history of fever and
  - Cough or
  - Shortness of breath
  - Difficulty of breathing

**AUDIENCE 13**  
**General Population****BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Stigma and discrimination

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Avoiding fear of COVID-19 affected families and individuals

**CORE MESSAGES**

- People who are treated for COVID-19 and cleared out of isolation centers no longer spread the virus
- Provide support to the affected family

**BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS**

Inappropriate and inconsistent use of masks

**RECOMMENDED BEHAVIORS**

- Wearing non-medical face masks appropriately at all times while in public places

**CORE MESSAGES**

- Using face masks in public places at all times reduces the risk of COVID-19 infection to yourself and others
- Apply the following when you use face masks:
  - One person should have 2-3 pieces of non-medical face masks
  - The mask shouldn't be used frequently without being washed
  - Do not touch the outer parts of the mask, use the strings to handle the mask
  - Once you use it, do not put it in your bag or pocket

## CHECKLIST OF QUALITY STANDARD FOR COVID-19 RISK COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

No.	Selected check points (Criteria)	0	1	2	Recommendation
1	Has specific behavior change objective				
2	Relates clearly (relevant) to the behavioral outcome / objectives				
3	Is evidence based				
4	Creative Brief was developed				
5	Pre-tested among potential audiences and reviewed by different experts				
6	Improvements incorporated as per the pretests findings and experts' comment				
7	The pictures and text reinforce the message (Visual aids such as photographs reinforce messages to help the audience understand and remember the messages)				
8	Culturally appropriate (Messages keep in mind regional differences, ranging from the language and dress of people portrayed in materials)				
9	Has a call for action (Messages state explicitly the action that audiences should take)				
10	Messages are factually and scientifically accurate				
11	Appropriate language used for the audience				
12	Producer organization known (all materials include the program's logo or theme, if applicable)				
13	Is of high artistic quality				
14	Is of high production quality				



No.	Selected check points (Criteria)	0	1	2	Recommendation
15	Contains the right amount of text (not text heavy or too much narration)				
16	Messages are clear and simple, and contain as few scientific and technical terms as possible				
17	Focuses on one issue				
18	Contains information on where to go for further information or support				
19	Messages and materials are consistent. All campaign elements have the same graphic identity, print materials use the same or compatible colours, types of illustrations, and typefaces.				
20	Messages and materials are appealing. (Messages stand out and draw the audience's attention, Materials are of high quality by local standards)				
21	Messages and materials are sensitive to gender differences (Messages do not reinforce inequitable gender roles or stereotypes; include positive role models, messages, materials, and activities are appropriate for the needs and circumstances of both women and men; consider differences in workload, access to information and services, and mobility)				

**0-25 points:** The material is not acceptable, as it is not developed based on the poster development evaluative criteria

**26-33 points:** The material needs some improvement before final production

**34-42 points:** The material fulfills criteria and can proceed to production





